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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 COLOMBO 001004

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STATE FOR SA/INS  
USPACOM FOR FPA

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TAGS: [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [CE](#) [LTTE](#)

SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: SCENESETTER FOR JUNE 13 CO-CHAIRS  
MEETING

REF: A. COLOMBO 0997  
[B](#). COLOMBO 0890

Classified By: AMB. JEFFREY J. LUNSTEAD. REASON: 1.4 (B,D).

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SUMMARY  
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[1](#)1. (C) Little has been achieved toward advancing the peace process in the year since President Chandrika Kumaratunga's United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA) took over the government in April 2004. The President and her inner circle blame both the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), with its inflexible preconditions for resumed dialogue, and the government's anti-peace Marxist nationalist alliance partner, the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), for the lack of progress. In the interim, both the LTTE and anti-LTTE militants, widely believed to be backed by the government, have engaged in low-intensity but persistent hostilities, eroding the effectiveness of the Ceasefire Agreement and aggravating an already tenuous security situation. As a result, the peace process is not merely stagnant; it is deteriorating. The December 26 tsunami alleviated immediate pressure from the international community for progress on the peace front while giving the Government an unexpected opportunity to re-engage with the Tigers without politically charged preconditions. Kumaratunga's protracted delay in taking advantage of this opportunity by signing the proposed "joint mechanism" on tsunami assistance with the LTTE raises questions about her ability to address the far more contentious issues involved in reaching a permanent resolution to the conflict. The June 13 co-chairs meeting in Washington should send a strong message to both the Government and the LTTE that the status quo--no sign of the political will needed to resume negotiations and an increasingly fragile ceasefire--is not acceptable. A joint statement (draft follows at Para 8 below) should call on both parties to desist from all hostilities and show greater flexibility and resolve to move the process forward. Co-chairs should urge both sides to conclude the joint mechanism on tsunami assistance while warning that continued missed opportunities could undermine the peace process and diminish international donor support. End summary.

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PEACE PROCESS PARALYZED  
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[1](#)2. (C) The first year of President Chandrika Kumaratunga's United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA) government has seen no identifiable progress toward a permanent, peaceful resolution to Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict. In the interim, the overall security situation in the country, especially in the beleaguered north and east, has deteriorated, as Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) militants and members of the breakaway "Karuna" group, which is widely believed to have some measure of Government backing, wage low-level but persistent hostilities that have killed more than 100 people over the past year (Ref A). Prior to the December 26 tsunami, the Government of Sri Lanka (GSL), as well as many

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impartial observers, rightly blamed the lack of progress in part on the LTTE's rigid insistence that its controversial proposal for an interim administration form the basis of resumed negotiations. Shouldering the rest of the blame, it was generally agreed (including by the President and her advisors), was the chauvinist Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), the GSL's junior partner in the alliance, which portrayed the LTTE interim administration proposal--and thus any support for resumed negotiations--as selling out national sovereignty.

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"JOINT MECHANISM" IN JEOPARDY  
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[1](#)3. (C) The tsunami gave both parties an unanticipated opportunity to move out from their respective corners and re-engage on the apolitical pretext of humanitarian assistance. Although the Tigers signaled through Norwegian

mediators as early as January their willingness to sign a so-called "joint mechanism" to coordinate relief in tsunami-affected areas of the north and east, Kumaratunga

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waited for several months to announce publicly her support for the proposal. By that time, the JVP had beaten the President to the public relations punch with a well-organized, sensationalist campaign against the mechanism, mobilizing monks, holding "patriotic" rallies and blanketing Colombo and provincial streets with lurid posters of bloodied Tiger victims. By May 1, when the President began her belated pro-mechanism campaign in earnest, the JVP propaganda machine had already succeeded in painting the "joint mechanism" in terms as politically poisonous as the "interim administration."

14. (C) Late out of the starting gate, Kumaratunga has recently done a good job of trying to demystify the now-controversial proposal for the general public, attempting to debunk JVP propaganda that the joint mechanism would undermine Sri Lankan sovereignty or grant de facto recognition to a separate Tiger state. There is a real danger, however, that the President's efforts may be too little too late. Privately she has told Western donors, including the Ambassador (Ref B), that she needs a little more time (how much remains unspecified) to bring the JVP around. Another probable cause for delay is purported Indian opposition to the mechanism. (We are not convinced such "opposition" means the Indians will try to scuttle the mechanism, however.) Kumaratunga's June 2-4 visit to New Delhi is widely assumed to be a bid to bring the Indians on board as well.

15. (C) The signing of a joint mechanism would likely have little practical effect on aid delivery (most INGO representatives agree that working-level local cooperation on tsunami assistance between the GSL and LTTE is effective),

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but its symbolic impact--demonstrating GSL and LTTE willingness to overcome political obstacles in the interests of humanitarian aid--would be substantial. At the same time, the symbolic impact of NOT signing would also be substantial. If the President is unable or unwilling to engage with the Tigers on a relatively simple issue like humanitarian aid, we have to question her ability/willingness to address the more complex and contentious issues--like an interim administration--that must be dealt with if a permanent resolution to the conflict is to be achieved.

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JVP OPPOSITION TO PEACE  
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16. (C) The joint mechanism is just one of many issues on which the JVP has confronted the President--and just one of many pretexts the alliance partner has used to threaten to leave the government over the past year. Despite these threats, the JVP nonetheless continues to stay in the government because the President generally agrees to abandon whatever initiative the one-time Marxist revolutionaries have found objectionable. The same scenario has been played out so frequently, however, that the repeated threats are beginning to sound hollow. Like the LTTE, the radical nationalist JVP thrives on conflict and ethnic polarization and will thus never support any GSL initiative to engage with the Tigers--even under the relatively innocuous framework of humanitarian assistance. The President knows this. On the other hand, the JVP leadership are long-term thinkers and planners who can be expected to weigh carefully the political costs of leaving the government now--before they have had a chance to deliver on promises to their constituency and thus reap even greater gains at the next election--with the benefits (short-term PR coverage but reduced national visibility). Despite the strident rhetoric, it seems unlikely to us that the JVP will act on its threat to walk out of the government at this time.

17. (C) Many Sri Lankans (including those who do not like her) believe the President is personally committed to finding a peaceful resolution but lacks the focus, long-term planning capacity and organizational ability to carry out that commitment. Many fear that her personal political ambitions--including possible Constitutional tinkering to allow an extended stay in power as an executive Prime Minister--are diverting her attention and dissipating her focus. As long as the President allows the extremist JVP to determine her government's agenda, she will never get anywhere on the peace process--and will earn even greater distrust and suspicion from moderate Tamils in the meantime. Co-chairs should stress the historic importance of moving ahead on peace (in tacit reference to Kumaratunga's legacy as a last-term President) to bolster her commitment to achieving a resolution.

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SUGGESTED DRAFT STATEMENT  
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18. (SBU) Below follows a suggested draft statement to be issued by the co-chairs:

--Two years ago the international community met in Tokyo to pledge support for the peace process.

--At that time participants stipulated in the Tokyo Declaration that "assistance by the donor community must be closely linked to substantial and parallel progress in the peace process."

--Unfortunately, we see little evidence of such progress.

--Negotiations have not resumed.

--Much--but not all--of the responsibility for this lack of progress lies with the inflexible preconditions for resuming negotiations set by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.

--The Ceasefire Agreement has been one of the hallmarks of the peace process. The suspension of hostilities has brought significant benefits to all communities in Sri Lanka.

--We note with the utmost concern, however, that while full-scale hostilities have not resumed, respect for the Ceasefire Agreement has been undermined by persistent violence, including assassinations of individuals affiliated with both parties, that violates both the letter and spirit of the Agreement.

--The continued violence undermines the security situation, endangers the civilian population and calls into question the commitment expressed by both parties to upholding the Ceasefire Agreement and achieving a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

--We call on both parties to take all necessary steps to end this violence and to enforce all provisions of the Ceasefire Agreement in areas under their control.

--We commend the Government of Norway for its efforts to facilitate a peaceful resolution and call on both parties to display greater flexibility with respect to preconditions for negotiations.

--We urge both the Government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam to conclude the joint mechanism on the delivery of tsunami assistance to ensure the equitable and timely distribution of aid to affected populations in the north and east.

LUNSTEAD